

CAPITAL CITY AIRPORT
(Capital City Airport, Capital City Aviation)
North Side of Grand River Avenue
Lansing Vicinity
Clinton County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-320-E

HAER
MICH
19-LANOV
1E-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Northeast Field Area
Chesapeake/Allegheny System Support Office
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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CAPITAL CITY AIRPORT, Capital City Aviation HAER No. MI-320-E

Location: Capital City Airport, West Ramp Area
Lansing vicinity, Clinton County, Michigan

UTM: 16.696210.4738320
Quad: Lansing North, 1:24,000

Date of Construction: 1949, and 1950

Engineer: Harold J. Olver, State of Michigan, Board of Aeronautics
Architect: None

Present Owner: Capital Region Airport Authority
Capital City Airport
Lansing, Michigan

Present Occupants: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Capital City Aviation is associated with the 60' x 60' metal hangar located at the southeast corner of the West Ramp complex of buildings. This hangar is typical of the all-metal, pre-engineered buildings constructed during this period to hangar and display airplanes, thereby representing the typical development of expanding airport services, and contributing to the significance of the West Ramp.

Project Information: The Capital City Aviation buildings are identified airport hazards under Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards, and are scheduled for removal. During an environmental review (1988), the State Historic Preservation Officer determined that the buildings meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and, therefore, would require mitigation of the adverse effect caused by their removal. The Memorandum of Agreement (1995) stipulates documentation of the Capital City Aviation buildings according to HAER guidelines. This documentation was undertaken to fulfill that stipulation.

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Refer to the Overview Report MI-320 for a more complete description of the history of aviation and its ties to the Lansing area. Establishment of fixed base operators at the Capital City Airport is covered more fully in the narrative text of the Overview Report. The documentation of this individual element provides a more specific history and significance of the Capital City Aviation buildings in their context of the Capital City Airport.

In 1929, three private fixed base operators erected hangars south of the 1927 Club Hangar in the following order: Foster Airways, SKF Air Service, Inc., and Wolverine Flying Service, Ltd. The site occupied by Wolverine was approximately that of the Vector Construction buildings. Sometime before 1934 Wolverine suffered a fire which destroyed the hangar and the business. Neither was ever rebuilt (Ruth 1992). The site remained vacant for at least fifteen years, until growth of aviation and the airport business pushed development of hangar options and opportunities to the vacant land.

Hebert Aviation Company started up after World War II as a fixed base operator with services similar to Francis Aviation and Hughes Flying Service. By 1949 Hebert had erected a new steel 60' x 60' hangar on the old Wolverine site, and by 1950 he had constructed a 20' x 40' concrete block office addition. The hangar is a standard metal-framed structure clad with galvanized corrugated steel panels for both the walls and roof, a concrete floor, and three sectional doors. Instead of the wood truss roof structure found at the State Hangar and at Hughes' Flying Service, metal angles form the barrel design roof structure built for Hebert.

Hebert also leased the Club Hangar in its location at the north end of the West Ramp, and moved it west of his new hangar in 1950. Rather than dismantling the Club Hangar, Hebert had it placed on logs and rolled down the runway by a barn mover to its new location. Instead of the dirt floor it had in its previous two locations, with this move it was placed on a concrete slab. The interior was also modified by adding insulation, and plastered walls and ceiling.

Intending to further expand his operation in 1951, the Department of Aeronautics prepared a drawing for Hebert of a structure that could accommodate displays, storage and school space. This building would have been located immediately north and adjacent to the Club Hangar in its new location; however, it was never built.

At some point after 1956, Hebert Aviation was bought out by Spartan Aviation, a Piper dealer and flight school operator. Spartan Aviation had three partners, Dean Crane, William "Ray" Wheeler, and Jim Frazier. Around 1960, Crane sold his share of the business and went to work for Francis Aviation. Later, Crane left Francis and became the chief pilot for the Department of Aeronautics (Zander 1995). Sometime before 1963 Ray Wheeler sold his share of Spartan to Frazier yet continued to work for Frazier. After a tragic plane accident in which Jim Frazier was killed, Spartan Aviation went out of business. Following this tragedy, Ray Wheeler started Capital City Aviation which operated primarily as a flight school (Zander 1995). It is thought that sometime thereafter the Spartan/Capital City Aviation buildings were sold to Landy Taylor and Associates, Inc., and that Capital City Aviation then leased space from Landy Taylor.

Landy Taylor's purchase of the Spartan/Capital City Aviation buildings probably occurred in January of 1963 since this was when Landy Taylor entered into a lease agreement with the State for use of the Club Hangar. Landy Taylor was neither a fixed base operator nor a flight school, but an airplane sales company that advertised throughout the country. The company used Hebert's 1949 hangar as a

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showroom for its Cessna planes.

It appears that Capital City Aviation never owned properties on the West Ramp of Capital City Airport, but leased space in several, providing maintenance and repair services as well as charter and flight instruction. In an appraisal done July 31, 1990 of Hangar Service, Inc.'s, otherwise known as CAM AIR, properties on the West Ramp, Capital City Aviation is mentioned as a lessee of part of Hangar Service's office building (Short 1990, 10). Capital City Aviation is also mentioned, in an appraisal done August 13, 1990 of Vector Construction, Inc.'s properties on the West Ramp, as a subtenant of the Club Hangar that was leased to Vector, and as a lessee of some office space in Vector's office building as well (Short 1990, pp.3, 34). It is also likely that Capital City Aviation leased Vector's 1949 hangar, as remnants of the Capital City Aviation sign are visible over the hangar doors. For a more complete description of the buildings that Capital City Aviation leased all or part of, refer to reports: MI-320-C; MI-320-D; and, MI-320-F. In the early 1970s, it is known that Capital City Aviation tried to build a new hangar and office building near the new terminal, but never succeeded, and in the end went bankrupt. All of the buildings that Capital City Aviation once leased space in are now scheduled for demolition to enable airport expansion, and for compliance with FAA regulations requiring a wider clear zone associated with the runways.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ENGINEERING DRAWINGS

Airport Master Plan Drawings. 1949 - 1986. The Capital Region Airport Authority maintains drawing files and a collection of historic drawings in their offices at the Capital City Airport. Quality varies from excellent ink on linen originals to poor quality blue-line diazo prints.

Hebert Aviation Offices. 1950 - 1951. State of Michigan, Department of Aeronautics. Drawn by Harold Olver. Simple line drawings for an office and rest rooms added to the 60' x 60' hangar, also a drawing to show future development attached to the Club Hangar.

B. HISTORIC VIEWS

Wolverine Flying Service. (1930). Lansing, Michigan. Private collection of Babe Weyant Ruth. After only three to four years of existence, this hangar was destroyed by a fire which melted the metal structure.

C. INTERVIEWS

Zander, Sylvester. Telephone interview with the author. 7 June 1995. Sylvester's association with the Capital City Airport was as an employee of Francis Aviation, Hebert Aviation, Spartan Aviation, and the Bureau of Aeronautics from the mid-1950s until the early 1990s.

D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Short, J.M. July 31, 1990. Appraisal of 16643 Airport Service Drive, Capital City Airport, Lansing, Michigan, "Hangar Services, Inc." Charlotte, Michigan. The original appraisal is available in the offices of the Capital Region Airport Authority.

Short, J.M. August 13, 1990. Appraisal of 16647 Airport Service Drive, Capital City Airport, Lansing, Michigan, "Vector Construction Co., Inc." Charlotte, Michigan. The original appraisal is available in the offices of the Capital Region Airport Authority.